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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

762.00/2-2759

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DATE: February 27, 1959

SUBJECT: Berlin Contingency Planning

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PARTICIPANTS: Arnold P. Heeney, Ambassador, Canadian Embassy
Saul Rae, Minister, Canadian Embassy
Livingston T. Merchant, Assistant Secretary, EUR
Woodbury Willoughby, Director, BNA

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Ambassador Heeney called at Mr. Merchant's invitation. Mr. Merchant opened the conversation by explaining that he was telling the Ambassador the status of contingency planning because of the special military and political relationship between Canada and the United States. He asked that the greatest precautions be taken to prevent leaks and noted that we had instituted special security precautions ourselves and have asked the United Kingdom and France to do likewise. Our policy, he said, would be to neither confirm nor deny any stories appearing in the press so as to avoid, by process of elimination, giving our position away.

Mr. Merchant emphasized that when we say we will not allow our rights in Berlin to be interfered with we mean it. We are well aware of the fragility of the situation in Berlin. If the people of Berlin were to believe we were wavering there would be panic with grave consequences. Accordingly, we will use all appropriate means to maintain our rights if they are challenged or their exercise obstructed.

We will not, Mr. Merchant went on to say, accept the substitution of the GDR for the USSR.

The USSR says that its rights and obligations will be transferred to the GDR, a proposition manifestly impossible for us as victors to accept. This is the firm position of the NATO countries.

Mr. Merchant explained the kind of thing being studied by those engaged

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in contingency planning.

Assuming agreement with the British and French on the precise wording of plans jointly developed to date, the working out of details, including such things as uniform identification marks on vehicles and the form of identification papers, will be shifted to Germany.

Ambassador Heeney referred to the recent AP report headlines that "The World is Threatened with Nuclear War over a Question of who should stamp papers" and asked whether planning had got to the stage of figuring out what force would be needed to counter the different types of force that might be used against us. Mr. Merchant said that we had not planned for such hypothetical situations; that we would continue to negotiate but would make our seriousness perfectly clear to the USSR at all stages so that there could be no possibility that the Soviets did not fully understand the risks they were taking.

Mr. Merchant expressed

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conviction that the Soviet leaders know us well enough to realize, especially with Eisenhower as President, that the United States could not launch a preventative attack.

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In response to a question, Mr. Merchant said that he thought there was still a slight hope that a conference of foreign ministers might be possible though one could not really know until the Soviet response to the notes of the Western countries had been received.

In answer to Mr. Rae's question as to when Germany and NATO would be brought into the picture, Mr. Merchant said that the Germans already are aware of the general principles of our thinking and that NATO would be consulted when planning had developed sufficiently to ensure that the US, UK and France were in agreement -- possibly in a month or six weeks.

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